

The Navigator



The Newsletter of the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's

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A Disciplined Faith: Celebration

Fr. Alan Andraeas, Prior

*"Let every created thing give praise to the LORD!"
Psalm 148:5*

It has taken us three and half years, but we've made it! This is the fifteenth and last discipline found in Saint Brendan's *Rule of Life*. We've examined the Interior Disciplines of Meditation, Prayer, Fasting, and Study; the Exterior Disciplines of Simplicity, Solitude, Submission, Service, Purity, and Temperance; and the Corporate Disciplines of Confession, Worship, Spiritual Direction, and Hospitality. Celebration is the last of the Corporate Disciplines. Do you feel like celebrating? I sure do! But wait. What does the discipline of celebration actually mean?

Sue and I lived in Puerto Rico for several years, up in the north-west corner of the island in the town of Aguadilla. Because of military requirements, I would have to fly in and out of San Juan rather frequently. The return flight would often be filled with

residents from the island coming home from visits to family members living in the upper 48 states. As the pilot would make the final approach announcements and the flight attendants gave the usual instructions about bringing seatbacks to their upright positions, everyone on the flight would begin praying—in tongues, with the Rosary, or from whatever prayer tradition

they came from—during the entire decent until the landing wheels touched the ground. And as soon as the tires hit the runway and the brakes were applied, the whole passenger compartment would literally erupt into cheers and applause. And that was just the beginning of the celebration. Waiting outside the baggage claim area was every extended family member of every person riding the plane; many of them with boom boxes turned up as loud as they could go—the party was in full swing! That was perhaps the most wonderful part of living in Puerto Rico: It was a culture that understood the place of celebration in daily life. But this makes it sound like celebration is just non-stop revelry. Well, in a sense it is; but of a very special and sanctified kind.



To paraphrase a line from St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo Regius (354-430 AD), *"The Christian should be an alleluia from head to foot."* Now remember, this was written by a man who lived the first half of his life in one big party, eager for every earthly excess that wealth and privilege could obtain; then he came under the redeeming and cleansing power of Christ wherein all those things fell by the wayside; and then the Holy Spirit led him to a place of authentic, joyous celebration.

He knew that it was God's design for celebration to fill the life of a believer. This is especially true for the Christian who is called to live out a monastic-tempered faith. For without celebration at the 'center' of one's life, the disciplines become dull, burdensome, pharisaic tools; the source of legalism and death; totally impossible to keep as Christ would have them in us.

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When that happens, we would do better to simply dump the classic disciplines rather than attempt to be shaped by them. With this in mind, let's see what Christian celebration is all about.

Stripped all the way down to its very foundation, celebration comes in two distinct kinds: a celebration for the things we see and a celebration for the things we don't see. Still sounds a bit fuzzy? Okay, let's begin with the things we see.

In the Celtic sense of Christian spirituality, our desire for celebration flows out of the constant awareness that God isn't just responsible for, but *truly* resident in all of creation (cf., Colossians 1:16-17); that somehow His 'thumbprint' has been pressed into absolutely everything (cf., Romans 1:19-20). Now I'm not talking about some kind of Gaian spiritism. Here's an example of what I mean: A never-before seen Mozart piano composition was recently found in an attic in the Tyrol Province of Austria; a piece he wrote when he was still just a child. When it came to light, the classical music world went crazy while waiting for its first performance. Not because Mozart was standing there at the piano, but that the young Mozart flowed out of the music and everyone could tell that Mozart was, indeed, the composer.

Around here it's more like when the municipal road crew fixes up a stretch of road after all the frost heave settles down. We can drive along that stretch and say, "Hey, Steve did the patch on that pothole; that's good work; no one does it better than him!" You see, it isn't a celebration that wrongly worships creation, but a continuous and joyful acknowledgement that God's "back parts" (cf., Exodus

33:23) are somehow revealed to us and made real to us through the material things all around us (Job 12:7-9); a world to which we've been given its care and stewardship.

With every breath we inhale, with every view of a sunlit sky, with the face of every friend or stranger we encounter, with every smell of freshly cut grass, with every sound of thunder, with the refreshing shade of every tree, with every breeze that washes across our skin, we are mindful that God has placed us in the midst of a creation that is "very good" (Genesis 1:31). This mindfulness or sensitivity allows us to walk in the *awareness* of the Lord, producing a heart of celebration that rejoices in God's constant presence.

"This mindfulness or sensitivity allows us to walk in the *awareness* of the Lord, producing a heart of celebration that rejoices in God's constant presence."

What of the things we do not see? Things like the circumstances or conditions of life that would rob us of a heart of celebration?

One of the things we must hold in constant mindfulness is that spiritual celebration is neither determined nor dictated by our external conditions. Celebration is not a reaction to an anticipated blessing like a huge tax return, nor the result of some external stimuli like heated car seats in the middle of winter. These are certainly enjoyable (especially the heated car seats around here!), but authentic celebration is the result of an internal relationship with Christ who is ever-present, even in what might seem like chaos. That is why Isaiah, prophetically describing the ministry of Christ, declares that the Messiah will give us "...beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" (Isaiah 61:3). In other words, what the world grudgingly accepts as its daily reality is not our reality in Christ.



Our celebration is an act of will, not an overflow of emotion. It's a deeply rooted trust that the eternal reality of heaven is always being superimposed over the fleeting, temporal reality of earth, particularly if we have a faith that's fiercely anchored on Christ. David reminds us of this, saying, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?...Though an army may encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war may rise against me, in this I will be confi-

dent" (Psalm 27:1-3). The prophet Habakkuk said the same thing: "Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls—yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Habakkuk 3:17-18).

This kind of celebration only comes as we cultivate and exercise the vision of heaven in our day-to-day lives. This is the heavenly vision that allowed King Hezekiah to encourage his people when the Assyrian siege armies of King Sennacherib surrounded Jerusalem, saying, "...do not be afraid nor dismayed...for there are more with us than with him" (2 Chronicles 32:7). This is the same heavenly vision which Elisha prayed his servant would see

when their home was surrounded by the army of Israel: "And Elisha prayed, and said, 'LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.' Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (2 Kings 6:17).

This celebration, both the external and internal kind, born of hope and trust in the eternal purposes and presence of God, is the medicine so desperately needed in a world bent on pessimism, fatalism, and despair. As lay monastics, a spirit of celebration is not only the gift we give back to God, acknowledging His absolute sovereignty in all things, but it is also the gift that we share with those around us who have nothing to hope for. For their sake, and for God's glory, may each of us be an alleluia from head to foot!

Rejoice!
Fr. Alan



MONASTIC MUSE

muse \ 'myüz \ **1:** *vb* to turn something over in the mind meditatively, **2:** to think reflectively, **3:** *n* a state of deep thought...

*"Lord, grant that I might carry the goodly yoke of Thy Son,
and I shall always be at rest; peaceful, glad, and joyous."*

—St. Tikhon of Zadonsk (1724-1783), *Russian Orthodox Bishop of Voronezh, spiritual writer, and wonderworker.*

Let the Celebration Begin!

Sue Andraeas

*Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us;
therefore let us keep the feast!
1 Corinthians 5:7-8*

FINALLY! We get to the last of the spiritual disciplines: CELEBRATION. It's about time! How many years have we been plodding through these disciplines? They're behaviors we'd rather not do because they're difficult and remind us that we are weak. Even studying about the spiritual disciplines takes courage and stamina. Congratulations to YOU for making it all the way through. (If you joined us somewhere in the middle of the series and want back issues, let me know. I'll send them to you.) Just for the sake of old times, let's go back to remembering why we started this all in the first place.

Spiritual disciplines are those intentional habits that are described in Scripture as being things God wants us to do because they are good for us. These behaviors are NOT necessary for salvation! But they are valuable for our walk of faith while on earth because they increase our faith, develop a closer rela-

tionship with our Savior, and improve our ability to reflect the love of Christ to others. That said, they are also a bit like getting socks for Christmas. What I mean is this. If you think about the events in your life that drew you closer to God, they were probably times of pain and suffering, not times of ease and comfort. And we normally think of blessings as fun and the disciplines as harsh and boring—so disciplines cannot also be blessings, right? But if you want to live your life in a way that brings you closer to God, then either YOU intentionally include behaviors that cause mild suffering and pain, or God will. He wants to be close to you; He wants you to be like Him. He knows it's more fun to get toys for Christmas but it's more practical and beneficial to get socks. And just when we concede to that, He COMMANDS us to celebrate! Party on!!

Before we start blowing up balloons



and making our potluck casseroles, let's look a little more closely.

Spiritual disciplines 'work' because God created them to be part of what we need for life on this earth. They are part of the checklist for maintaining a healthy physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual life. Because of this, even when practiced outside of a relationship with Christ, these disciplines are helpful. Very helpful! For example, you don't have to search too hard to find testimonies about the benefits of fasting. Or meditation. Or coming to terms with your weaknesses (aka, confession). Or letting go of materialism (simplicity). Or getting perspective of your life by consulting a life coach (spiritual direction). Or not always having to control everything (submission). Or helping others (hospitality/ giving alms). Any good mentor—even one who's an atheist—will steer you in these directions. That's because any good mentor will know that these habits and behaviors will bring wellbeing and maturity, even if they don't know why. But as Christians, we DO know why. And if we are wise, we won't settle for habits that benefit us only during our earthly lives. We want benefits that will travel to heaven with us! God created us to grow and mature, as His children—His earthly AND heavenly children—by living this way. Is it fun? Not always. Is it work? Definitely—always! Is celebration the reward for our hard work? If it were, it wouldn't be a discipline! So how is celebration hard work? How can celebration be sacrificial?

Celebration is like the binding of a hardcover book; like the beautiful box that contains a diamond ring. On its own, it's totally meaningless. Partying for no reason other than to party is quite damaging. We can get addicted to the entertainment and lack of responsibility. We can forget the reason God put us here in the first place. At the very core of our Christian faith is NOT reward; it's worship. God promises salvation to those who believe in His Son, to those who believe He lived, died, and rose again to glorify His Father and to redeem us. WE benefit from Christ's obedience when we worship him as the Son of God. His gift of grace IS reason to celebrate!! No doubt about it. But if we forget the reason we are celebrating, we have made an idol of celebration. Our celebration required great sacrifice. God sacrificed His Son; Jesus sacrificed His total union with His Father by becoming human in order to suffer and die for us. If celebration is the hard cover of a book—or a jewelry box—then suffering is the story contained in the book; the jewel of great value worth protecting.

“Celebration is the culmination of all the other disciplines and cannot be practiced without them.”

Let me give you a personal example from this summer.

We've talked about haying before in these newsletters. Some of you have even joined us in the hay fields while on retreat here. It's work. Hard work. This past year, it was even tougher due to injuries, illnesses, loss of helpers. But we do it anyway because if you want animals in the winter in Maine, you need something to feed them. (And some of us love being in the hay fields even though it's tough!) It was the end of August when we got a call from Nancy, one of the women who, though seriously injured, had helped by driving the hay wagon truck. Usually, she's one of the hardest working people in the fields, and last year it was hard for her to be 'stuck' driving. But when we had finished the last fields, she threw a hay party. It was mostly for her family but also included us and a few others. There was too much



food. Too many deserts. Playing games in the yard while her horses were grazing right beside us on their side of the fence. This wasn't 'just' a party; this celebration had meaning. The suffering and pain had paid off. We all had hay in the barns. The Lord had blessed us all. Anyone at that party who had not helped in the fields still had a great meal and a good time! But those of us who had

sweated through the summer appreciated its meaning more deeply. And I think Nancy appreciated it most of all.

In the Old Testament, there are several feast days mentioned. All of them required work and sacrifice first. There were feasts to celebrate that the fields were planted. (No grocery stores. If you don't get this part done, there's nothing to eat for a year). There were feasts after the harvest (A million things can go wrong between planting and getting food in the barns. And remember—no machinery! They celebrated with blisters on their hands and sore muscles everywhere!) Then there's the Passover. At best, it cost a perfect lamb. The loss of one lamb may not sound like much until you remember that this perfect male sheep would be their best breeding stock for the coming

year. They not only gave their best in this one animal, but their best hope for their entire flock. And to them, that flock was security. But if they failed to sacrifice their 'best shot at the future,' the sacrifice would be even greater when the Angel of Death came by! Suffering, and faith, are required for the Passover celebration. It is also required of us for our discipline of celebration.

For Christians, this Passover sacrificial feast has taken on even more significance. Christ our Passover—our perfect lamb—Heaven's best hope for the future—has been sacrificed for us. His blood has been placed on the door of our heart. Because of this, the Angel of Death passes over us and we will never die. Our physical bodies will decay on this physical planet, but our spiritual life will continue in our spiritual body in heaven. We will never know what it is to not be alive! Think about that. We will never cease to be!! We will breathe our last breath of earthly air, but it will not be our last breath. With our next inhale of heavenly air, we will be ready to join in the celestial chorus, singing praises to the One who brought us from glory to glory! IS THAT NOT WORTH CELEBRATING!?!?!? Is that not worth living a disciplined life for?? I have to remind myself of this constantly, but I think that's because I have not fully embraced a life of spiritual discipline yet.

Taking up your cross—laying down your life for Him—is a daily (sometimes hourly) decision. There are days when I'd rather just 'go with the flow,' when earthly life seems tough enough without adding intentional hardship of spiritual disciplines. There are days I'd rather skip temperance and eat the whole pizza. Days I want to keep ALL my stuff and not ponder whether I own IT or it owns ME. There are days I don't want to entertain people in my house, or when I can't tell the difference between solitude and loneliness—and I don't want to be alone. I don't want to study, and I don't want to submit to anyone. There are times when, if I'm truthful, I think I've sacrificed

enough and have a tough enough life. (Poor old me!) But if I'm honest, I know I only feel that way because of my spiritual weakness. And that weakness usually comes from NOT maintaining a life of Christian discipline!! It is certainly not God's fault, or that of Christ's. It's mine. Worst of all, my pity party makes our weekly Celebration at the altar seem repetitive and



bland. My lack of sacrifice for the sake of Christ dulls my ability to see His sacrifice.

Partying through life requires no sacrifice. Spiritual celebration requires I sacrifice EVERYTHING. Celebration is, then, the culmination of all the other disciplines and cannot be practiced without them. The more we give our lives to Christ, and I don't just mean lip service but truly dive into the reality of eternal life, the more deeply we enter into that celebration of our Passover Feast, and the more earnestly we anticipate the Heavenly Celebration that is to follow. In the end, something must be sacrificed before celebration is genuine. So, in the end, what appears to be the easiest of disciplines requires constantly working to perfect all the others. But it's worth it. It's VERY worth it. Christ is worth it all!

Rejoice!
Sue Andraeas

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WE COVET YOUR PRAYERS!!!

Please continue to pray for Saint Brendan's and these various needs:

- For final construction of Saint Brendan's wood shop.
- For strong and willing hands to labor with us.
- Praise God for the ability to minister to local people through the gifts of heating oil, fuel, food, transportation assistance, and hospital visits.
- For necessary remodeling of the Priory House so that we can host more retreatants and guests.
- For electric and insulation in the chapel this spring.
- For favor with medical concerns and upcoming surgeries.

The Final Word: St. Maria Skobtsova — Mother Maria, or Saint Mary of Paris; Russian noblewoman, poet, nun, and member of the French Resistance during WWII. Died in the gas chamber of Ravensbrück, 1945. Canonized in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Renunciation teaches us not only that we not greedily seek advantages for our soul but that we not be stingy, that we always be extravagant in our love, that our soul holds nothing back, that we not hold back anything sacred and valuable which we would not be ready to give up in Christ's name to those who need it. Spiritual renunciation is the way of holy foolishness, folly in Christ. It is the opposite of the wisdom of this age. It is the blessedness of those who are poor in spirit. It is the outer limit of love and the deepest wellspring of celebration.

According to material laws, if I give away a slice of bread, then I became poorer by one slice of bread. (And by extension) if I give my love, I have become impoverished by that amount of love. And if I give up my soul then I become completely ruined and have nothing left to save. According to the law of the spirit, every spiritual treasure given away not only returns to the giver like an unspent ruble but it grows and becomes stronger. He who gives receives back in return; he who becomes poor becomes wealthier. In turning away from the exclusive focus upon Christ in a genuine act of self-negation and love, one offers himself to others, and in that, one meets Christ himself face to face in the one for whom he offers himself. And in that earthly communion he unites with Christ himself; and through Christ, he receives the joys heaven though he trod the soil of earth.



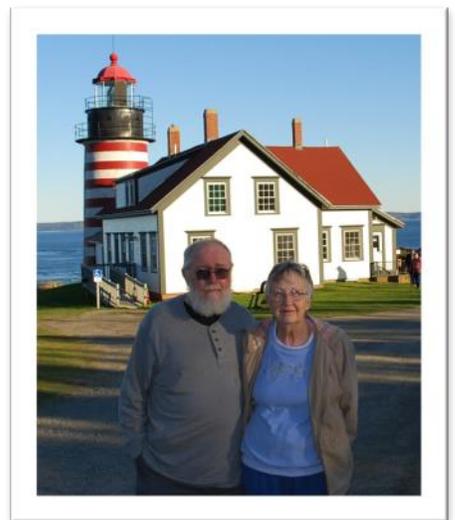
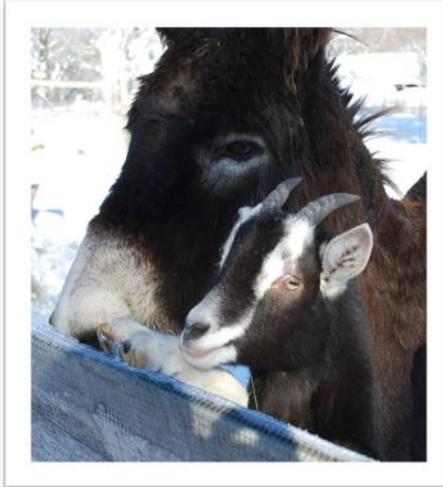
The mystery of union with man becomes the mystery of union with God. That which was given away returns. The love which was expended never diminishes the source of that love, because the source of love in our heart is Love itself, Christ. Here we are speaking about a genuine emptying out, in a partial imitation of how Christ emptied himself by becoming incarnate in humanity. We must likewise empty ourselves completely, becoming, so to speak, incarnate in another human soul, offering to it the full measure of God's image which is contained in ourselves.

—From the essay: "Types of Religious Lives"

**Dance, then, wherever you may be /
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he /
And I'll lead you all wherever you may be /
And I'll lead you all in the dance, said he /**

**"Lord of the Dance"
Text: Sydney Carter. Music: 19th cent. Shaker tune. 1963.**

Life at the Priory house



TOP LEFT: Retreatants Charlie and Joseph visited Saint Brendan's from Southern Maine. **TOP MIDDLE:** Fr. Alan has joined the Dennysville Volunteer Fire Department. **TOP RIGHT:** Our friend "Pilly" and Sue cut and stacked about three cords of firewood in one day this week. The old timers around here would say that we're already behind schedule; that firewood for this coming winter should've been cut LAST year! **MIDDLE LEFT:** Sir Doyle (the donkey) and Flannigan (the goat) want to be first in line for the afternoon hay. **MIDDLE CENTER:** Dave, our tom turkey, is a walking sign that Spring has finally arrived. **MIDDLE RIGHT:** Dick and Sue, Sue's dear friends (since childhood!) from Pennsylvania, came up for a visit. They're standing in front of the West Quoddy Lighthouse, the most eastern tip of the continental United States. **BOTTOM LEFT:** Helen, our friend from the next town over, came over last week for an 'inspection visit' of our newborn goat kids. **BOTTOM MIDDLE:** This is Molly. We just bought her. She's our newest addition to Saint Brendan's and Sue's dream horse! **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Simon, our goat buck, is very proud of his "crown of glory." Psssst, don't tell him it's just hay stuck in his horns!

How to Support this Ministry

Although we no longer have membership fees, we do have ministry expenses. Please consider making a donation to Saint Brendan's with a check or money order, a gift through PayPal, or even a monthly, automatic "Bill Pay" donation through your bank. Even \$5.00 a month (\$60.00 a year) greatly enhances our retreatant care and local ministry.

